

Zen Master Seung Sahn once asked a student,

*"Why are you sitting for the winter?"*

*"Because, I want to."*

*"That's a number-one BAD answer!"*

*You ask me the same question, ok?"*

*"OK. Why are you sitting for the winter?"*

*"For you."*

*excerpt from*

*The Wisdom of Solitude: A Zen Retreat in the Woods by Zen Master Bon Yeon*

The mantra this morning is a bare wisp of a filament, quiet, steady, and porous enough to allow in fast-moving shadows on the floor, flickering and changing with the clouds passing, and the wind. Branches, leaves, and the side of my head rush to and fro in silhouette. A plane flies overhead through it all, through me, through the mantra, through the shadows of the branches. This has all been going on for thousands of years, yet it is only now.

No one is in any of it.

# FOR YOU

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You've no doubt heard the expression "Nobody home." This is usually used in a derogatory fashion, indicating that the person in question is less than brilliant. We Buddhists have found another way to look at "Nobody home."

"Nobody home" means that no matter how much you dissect yourself, down to the cellular level, the electrons, the quarks, the whatever-it-is-called smallest part you can reference, it is moving and changing. There is not one thing in this whole wide world that is fixed. If you find it, it's gone already. Since there isn't one single solitary thing in the whole universe that is fixed, it stands to reason there is no constant "self" that is experiencing any of this. Any reasonable person can understand this—it actually makes common sense.

As basic as it may be, it is the ever-elusive essence of the Buddhist path. This is the point we keep harping on, we keep trying to realize, and we keep coming back to over and over again. Why does it require so much time and energy? Because our habit to approach the world with "my" point of view is so deeply embedded in us that it's difficult to remember the "my" part is just smoke and mirrors. All the problems and confusion we've ever had are based in this misperception that it's happening to "me." Everything. Anger, desire, fear, jealousy, hurt—all of it. Every time we take a closer look, we can see there is no such thing.

Dae Soen Sa Nim has penetrated this phenomenon by changing his habit of looking at life from the point of view of "I" to having no point of view at all. Since he has no point of view, his mind is like the universe: vast, wide, and limitless. This is how he can say such an outrageous thing like "For you." And really mean it.

The fact that he means it and lives it every day inspires me so much.

I tell myself over and over, "If he can do it, I can do it."

This is the kind of ambition the world could use more of. ☸

# A LOTUS GROWS OUT OF THE MUD

excerpt from *The Wisdom of Solitude: A Zen Retreat in the Woods*  
by Zen Master Bon Yeon

*it takes horsehit to grow bamboo  
and it too longs forever weeps begs to the wind*

*Ikkyu*

"I want." "I have." "I need." "I," "I," "I." It's endless! If something beautiful comes out of all this suffering and passion, may it save all beings, because it sure as hell isn't saving me.

Today I am so dying for something different to eat, other than rice and beans. If I even so much as *look at* another soybean I am going to throw up. I refuse to ever eat one again. Ever.

I am presently visualizing coffee from Dunkin' Donuts, in one of those fantastic cardboard cups with the soothing pink and orange logo on it. Right now, if you put that in front of me beside the most handsome Hollywood actor, I would definitely choose the Dunkin' Donuts coffee. No contest.

I see croissant sandwiches. During sitting I plan my future as a caterer and design menus from appetizers to desserts for fictitious weddings and birthday parties. I keep trying to get back to the breath and to the mantra, but the catering scenarios are coming back with a vengeance. After a lunch of the usual rice and sunflower seeds, I head out for a walk. It's sunny out, almost spring-like. Early afternoon, with this kind of gorgeous weather, the only thing missing really *is* the food.



About a mile down the dirt road, between several pine trees, I see a most unusual sight: a parked car. The orange color doesn't fit in with everything else. I don't know whose it is, but its presence can only mean one thing: *there might be something to eat in that car!*

Could it be?

An open window!

As if in a Yogi Bear cartoon, I spy an actual *picnic basket* in the back seat on the floor. Yes, a *bona fide*, old-fashioned, picnic basket, with the checkered cloth, the little wicker handles and the whole bit.

Lust mind kicks in. I look to my left, then to my right, making sure no other animal can catch my prey. A thought flits across my mind that I shouldn't reach in that window or in that picnic basket, but is instantly overpowered by the feeling of the wicker handle against the palm of my quivering little hand. Lifting the lid, my deepest prayer has been answered: Lorna Doone's!!! How many can I take without the owner noticing an errant Zen student has been here? Perhaps it is a gift from God for all this hard training. Or, is it a test of will? I don't care. Grabbing four cookies, I jam one into my mouth, reserving the others for later. All clarity is gone. The mantra is gone. My body has been taken over by a group of aliens. I hurriedly go back to the cabin propelled by an extreme adrenaline rush and try to savor the other three. Ten seconds of pleasure, then tragically, they are gone. I could go back and get more, but it's two miles round trip and dark now. Plus I'd break the schedule and I can't do that...can I? No, I can't.

Guilty now, I'm out of balance.

"I've strayed."

"I'm no good."

"It doesn't matter."

"Yes, it does! Dae Soen Sa Nim ate only pine needles, he would have never fallen for the Lorna Doones!"

"Jesus Jane, for better or for worse, you chose to adhere to a regimen most people would never have undertaken in a million years. Why not allow yourself this small transgression?"

"Will the owners of the car notice the cookies are missing?"

"Why have I lost my mind like a crazy fool, for a fleeting taste of cookies?"

"What's so powerful about taste anyway?"

"On the other hand, in the grand scheme of things, what's a few Lorna Doones? Why obsess over such an insignificant thing?"

Mind can and will make a mountain out of a molehill, regardless of the content. Like a pebble in a pond, the ripples of each thought go outward in circles farther than you can imagine. It's humbling to know that on a normal day in my usual life back home, this level of mind activity is going on... times ten million. It's just going so fast that I can't notice it.

There is no sutra that can show me the mud of endless desire mind like those cookies did.

Bamboo will grow here, and lotus flowers. ☸

